

THE BIRTH OF ITALIAN SOCIETY OF PSYCHIATRY

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Abstract

The “Meetings of the Italian Scientists” began more than 40 years before the Italian unification and offered important opportunities to Italian psychiatrists to discuss their work and research. After unification, at the Meeting held in Rome in 1873, a project of scientific association of the Italian alienists was formed, the “Società Freniatria Italiana”, with the aim of “increasing psychiatric studies, progress in the institutions of asylums, and protection and benefit of the insane”. In 1932 the association changed its name in “Società Italiana di Psichiatria” (Italian Society of Psychiatry). The following year, the new Society held its first Congress in Imola. In the second part of this paper, the history of the Society together with that of Italian psychiatry and society during the 20th century is briefly remembered, along with the two World Wars, Fascism, the progressive submission of Psychiatry to Neurology, the decay of the situation of inmates inside hospitals, the approval of Law 238 in 1976 which marked the independence of Psychiatry from Neurology and the dialectic encounter with the reform movement led by Franco Basaglia until the approval of Law 180 in 1978, which established the closure of psychiatric hospitals in Italy and the organization of an original model of care in the community.

The birth of the Italian Society of Psychiatry and its premises

The first “Riunione degli Scienziati Italiani” (Meeting of Italian Scientists) was held in Pisa in 1839, more than 20 years before the unification of Italy, on the initiative of Prince Carlo Luciano Bonaparte (1803–1857), under the patronage of Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany. Medicine was one of 6 areas in which debate took place. After the first reunion, later meetings were held in Turin (1840), Florence (1841), Padua (1842), Lucca (1843), Milan (1844), Naples (1845), Genoa (1846) – where a classification of mental disorders on the basis of phrenology was discussed – Venice (1847). They took so place in all the main pre-unification States, with the exception of the Papal State, which had a suspicious attitude towards them. Initially there were a few hundred participants, which grew to exceed 1,600. Many psychiatrists belonging to the first Italian generation took part, including Benedetto Trompeo (1796(7)-1872) from Turin, Biagio Miraglia (1814-1885) ¹ and Timoteo Riboli (1808-1895) from Naples, Pier Francesco Buffa (1813-1844) from Genoa, and psychiatric issues were often debated ^{2,3}.

With the wars and turmoil of 1848–49 the first round of meetings was suspended, and resumed only one year after the unification of Italy with Siena (1862), where the psychiatrists discussed the foundation of an Italian psychiatric society and illustrated a proposal for a law on psychiatric assistance. Other meetings took place in Rome (1873), three years after its conquest by the Italian army, and Palermo (1876). How-

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FIGURE 1.
Benedetto Trompeo.

ever, before the unification they constituted the most important opportunity for international comparison between Italian Scientists of the peninsula and contained an implicit political reference to it. Now, it was not only the fact that the meetings had lost, by the end of the Risorgimento, their original and politically explosive character to determine their crisis. In reality, also it was the fact that, as remarked by Andrea Verga (1811–1895)⁴ at the meeting of Rome, the evolution of science and the rise of its devotees made it necessary that Italian scientists continued to cultivate their fields by accepting the fragmentation of knowledge, and maintaining the same spirit but working in different fields independently from one other.

In fact, on the occasion of the XI Meeting of Rome, from 23 to 28 October 1873, the first encounter between psychiatrists aimed towards the establishment of a scientific society in the field of psychiatry – similar to what had already occurred in the UK (1841), United States (1844), France (1852) and Germany (1864) – was held. A first attempt in this direction, with the Società Frenopatica Italiana founded by Miraglia at Aversa in 1861, was exhausted after a few years: at the meeting of Siena this attempt failed. For this reason, the “Archivio italiano per le malattie nervose e più particolarmente per le alienazioni mentali” (Italian Archive for Nervous Diseases, and in particular for mental alienations), founded in Milan by Verga

in 1852 as an “Appendice psichiatrica alla Gazzetta Medica Italiana” (Psychiatric Appendix to the Italian Medical Journal), published an invitation in September 1873 to the Italian alienists to participate the following month at the meeting in Rome.

On 23 October 1873, a dozen stakeholders was present, including Verga and the psychiatrists Carlo Livi (1823–1877) from Siena⁵, Clodomiro Bonfigli (1838–1909) from Ferrara, Giuseppe Girolami (1809–1878) from Rome, Cesare Lombroso (1838–1909) from Pavia⁶, Gaetano Cappelli from Lucca, Paolo Fiordispini from Rome, Antonio Michetti (1829–1909) from Pesaro and Giuseppe Neri from Perugia. Apart from Verga, they were mainly from central Italy, but others joined even if absent: Serafino Biffi (1822–1899) from Milan, Stefano Bonacossa (1804–1878) from Turin, Agostino Sbertoli from Pistoia, Francesco Pignocco from Palermo, Augusto Tamburini (1848–1919)⁷ from Reggio Emilia, Roberto Adriani from Perugia and Miraglia. The architect Francesco Azzurri (1827–1901), who projected the asylum of Santa Maria della Pietà in Rome and those of Siena and Alessandria, the physicians Giulio Bastianelli and Clito Carlucci (1810–1879), a protagonist of the Risorgimento and first Rector of the University of Rome after the unification, were also present. Once the intention of establishing a scientific society in the field of

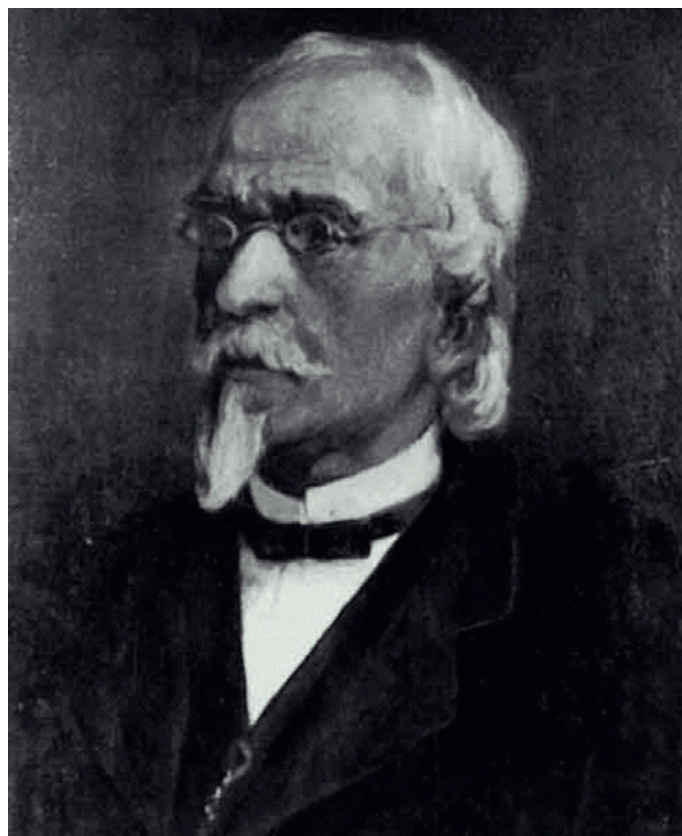


FIGURE 2.
Andrea Verga.

psychiatry was verified, the first issue addressed was the delimitation of its object of study, and consequently its name.

A first hypothesis for the name was ‘Medical-psychological Society’, using the French example to also include the philosophers engaged in psychology. This hypothesis was rejected by the majority; the medical nature of the society was so established, and the discussion was between psychiatry, with reference to the Greek concept of “psyche,” and “freniatria,” with reference to that of “fren.” The latter hypothesis was preferred because – as confirmed by Livi two years later when he was choosing a title for the new scientific journal of the mental hospital in Reggio Emilia – it was more suited to represent the physical and moral character (i.e. organic and psychological) of the discipline. The Society was thus called “Società Freniatria Italiana” (SFI). Finally, the proposal to open the domain of the new Society to forensic medicine, advocated by Livi and Lombroso, was rejected.

The Statute was unanimously approved, in which art. 1 established the aims of the Society: “the increase of psychiatric studies, progress in the institutions of asylums, protection and benefit of the insane.” It was agreed that the alienists present were considered the founding members, that the members would meet at a congress every 3 years and that the first congress, where 100 psychiatrists participated, would take place the following year in Imola. Verga was acclaimed first president, a three-year term assignment, flanked by Biffi, who would succeed him as president in 1891, in the office of secretary-treasurer. The new Society was endowed with a periodical, and the Archive was then subtitled “Organ of the Società Freniatria Italiana.”

The two main themes discussed were that of the classification and statistics of mental diseases and the need for a national law in the field of psychiatric assistance. There was no time to discuss a third issue, that of forensic asylums, which was postponed until the congress at Imola.

Those days of October 1873 now seem very far away because two years ago the XLVI congress was held in Milan, and to keep track of them is not common in today’s debate, with little exception^{8,9}. Indeed, the issues discussed (nosology, statistics, law, forensic hospitals) are astonishingly similar to those on the agenda of our Society today.

We cannot say that our Society has always remained faithful in the threefold mandate to work on the progress of psychiatric studies, the improvement of assistance and the protection and benefit of the patients. However, we believe that this threefold aim,

adopted many years ago by a generation of psychiatrists who in their youth were hardened by the bitter epics of the Risorgimento and sprouted from the root of the pre-unification Meetings of Italian Scientists¹⁰, witnessed close connection between the psychiatric question and the issue of freedom, democracy and civil progress in the history of Italy¹¹⁻¹³, and remains a commitment and challenge for today’s psychiatrists.

Notes for a short history of the SIP from its origin to Law 180 of 1978

In 1896, Tamburini, who is still remembered for his studies of clinics¹⁴ and was very active in the issue of organizing the asylums, became president of the SFI. With the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, the interest of psychiatrists was increasingly moving from the management of care in the asylum to neurological and histological research. The subordination of psychiatry to neurology, which ended only in the 1960s, began in that moment. In 1907, this overwhelming interest in issues of neurology led many leaders of the SFI to create the Italian Society of Neurology, whose first president was Leonardo Bianchi (1848–1927)¹⁵. In the same years, University

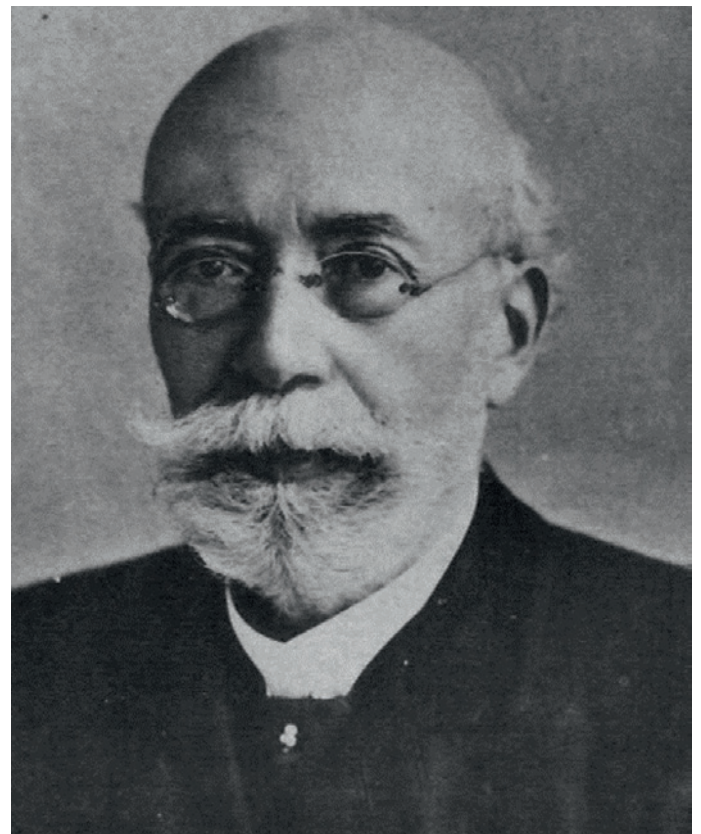


FIGURE 3.
Augusto Tamburini.

Chairs of Psychiatry were disjoined by the Directions of asylums, and both the prestige of the discipline and the quality of assistance were damaged by that separation.

In 1904, Law 36 regulating the functioning of asylums and the assistance of the insane was approved. The leadership of the SFI, and particularly Bianchi, was very active. Hoping to put a stop to the constant increase of inmates, it stated that only the alienated “dangerous to themselves and others or of public scandal” were to be hosted in an asylum, while others remained in the custody of their families or municipalities. Accepting the wishes of the SFI, the absolute authority of the Director on the other psychiatrists and the administrative staff was also strengthened. Next autumn, the 12th Congress of the SFI was held in Genoa, and Ernesto Belmondo (1863–1939) from Padua intervened on the issue of physical restraint, arguing the need to adapt the politics of no restraint in Italy, already pursued in Britain and Germany, and some still very interesting arguments were proposed¹⁶. His position was partially accepted by the SFI and affected the implementing regulation of the law, approved in 1909.

During the years of World War I, the commitment of psychiatrists in selection of recruits and in diagnostic evaluation and treatment of soldiers who showed symptoms of mental illness was remarkable. A complex organization was predisposed, involving many asylums, and led by Tamburini with the rank of Medical General. A promising young psychiatrist, Gaetano Perusini (1879–1915), who had worked with Alzheimer in the neuro-histological study of dementia, died in a field hospital at the front.

During the presidency of Tamburini, the leadership of the SFI also had to cope with the complaints of the gynaecologist Luigi Maria Bossi (1858–1919), supporter of a bizarre thesis on the genital origin of female mental illnesses, on several interesting topics such as the weakness of the foundations of psychiatric diagnosis, the poor quality of life of inmates in asylums, the attitude of closure of psychiatrists to the possibility of continuing care at home and their attitude of hostility and self-sufficiency with the other branches of medicine and the general hospital¹⁷.

When Tamburini died in 1919, Enrico Morselli (1852–1929)¹⁸, from the University of Genoa, was elected president in a regime of substantial continuity. During his presidency, the SFI discussed psychoanalysis, and after an initial position of opening later rejected it. In the same period, the issue of sterilizing patients and of killing chronic ones considering them-

human life without value, two theses which had supporters in both North European and North American scientists, were strongly rejected by Morselli¹⁹ and by the other leaders of the Society after him, including his successor Arturo Donaggio (1868–1942). Morselli joined the Fascist movement and in 1925 signed the “Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals” promoted by the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, but was able to protect the SFI to the intrusion of the regime, and there is almost no trace of political influence in the Proceedings of the Congresses during his decade.

This changed after his death, when the regime’s attempt to influence Italian social life in all its aspects became more insistent. In 1932 under the presidency of Donaggio from the University of Modena, with a referendum among members the anachronistic name of the Society was changed to Società Italiana di Psichiatria (SIP, Italian Society of Psychiatry). This step sanctioned the break with the generation of the founders (that of the alienists or “freniatri” of the 19th century), and for the SIP this was the true turning point to the new century. His figure is certainly the most discussed among those who held the presidency of our Society. As a fascist, he attached to psychiatry, as all medicine, a primarily political function within Mussolini’s organic conception of the State. Influenced by the rhetoric of the regime, he was a supporter of the work of craftsman as typically Italian, and more physiological and healthy than the industrial one. When in 1932 Luigi Scabia (1868–1934), director of the asy-



FIGURE 4.
Enrico Morselli.

lum of Volterra²⁰, turned to the SIP for help against the harassment to which he was subjected because he was antifascist, his request fell on deaf ears. In the mid-1930s Donaggio joined the fascist racism ideology in terms of exaltation of the Italian race, heir to the imperial function of Rome, but in his writings a disparaging attitude towards people of colour or Jews is absent. However, he did write in a magazine which supported fierce racist and anti-Semitic positions, “La difesa della razza” (“The defence of race”)²¹. In July 1938, his name appeared among the signatories of the “Manifesto of Racist Scientists,” and SIP was the only scientific society to support it. At the XXII Congress of 1940, Donaggio did not deny authorship of the Manifesto, but he said that he was honoured that Mussolini had affixed his name under Mussolini’s ideas, leaving it somehow understood that he was not really one of the authors, but avoiding explicit abjuration. At the end of the Proceedings of the Congress, it was announced emphatically and with enthusiasm that Italy had entered the war few days later. Donaggio was not a fierce racist; he probably adhered to the Fascist movement for vainglory, nationalist pride and perhaps convenience, in addition to opportunism, to defend his position of prestige and benefits, and perhaps that of the psychiatrists who he believed he so well represented. But it was more an opportunistic attitude of many, rather than the fanaticism of a few, that allowed the fascists to govern Italy and cause so many disasters²².

The “Manifesto of Racist Scientists” was the scientific basis for the “Racial Laws” enacted the next autumn: Gustavo Modena (1876–1958), being a Jew, had to give up the vice presidency of the SIP and the direction of the asylum of Ancona, and other psychiatrists, such as Marco Levi Bianchini (1875–1961)²³, were forced to give up their career and scientific activities. Donaggio died in 1942 in a car accident; Modena looked for leaders who would temporarily assume the presidency, until the war would allow a new Congress. However, no one accepted and he had to keep it for himself; thus, for three years the SIP had an acting president who was forced to leave the field of study and the SIP itself by unjust laws, to which it helped provide a pseudoscientific pretext.

Ugo Cerletti (1887–1963)²⁴, from the University of Rome, was, after having discovered the electroconvulsive therapy in 1938, the vice president of the SIP, but he rejected the proposal of Modena in 1942 because he was in disagreement with the regime²⁵. He accepted the presidency only at the XXIII Congress of 1946, where two young psychiatrists, Gior-

gio Padovani and Luigi Bonfiglioli, proposed a report instigated by the SIP about what happened to Italian psychiatry during the war: four psychiatrists died because of bombing or struggles in psychiatric hospitals, including Arrigo Tamburini (1878–1943), Augusto’s son, in Ancona; Giovanni Mercurio (1916–1945) was captured as a partisan and died in Mauthausen; Giuseppe Muggia (1877–1944) and Guglielmo Lippi Francesconi (1899–1944) were killed by the Nazis. Many others were deported to Germany. Partisans, deserters and Jews were hidden in many psychiatric hospitals, but some Jewish patients were captured in them in north-eastern Italy by the Germans or fascist policemen, and died in lagers. Deaths in psychiatric hospitals directly due to war actions numbered about 300 among patients and staff, but other deaths between patients due to scarcity of food and drugs, and to the improvidence of authorities, ranged from 24,000 to 30,000²⁶.

In 1946, Cerletti was the first to compare the Italian asylums to the Nazi concentration camps, an expression which would be used repeatedly by others in subsequent years²⁷. He was president of the SIP until 1963, when he was succeeded by Mario Gozzano (1898–1996) from the University of Rome until the XXX Congress held in Milan in 1968, and then by Carlo Lorenzo Cazzullo (1915–2010), from the University of Milan, who during his youth belonged to the Resistance²⁸. The same year, the SIP remained close to the Minister of Health Luigi Mariotti (1912–2004), who promoted a reform of psychiatric assistance, Law 431, with the aim of bringing it in step with the French one. The experience of Franco Basaglia (1924–1980)²⁹ in Gorizia was now, however, already widely advanced and in the same year his most famous book, “L’istituzione negata” (The institution denied), was published. Therefore, Law 431 was already behind the times when it was instituted. During the 1968 Congress held in Milan, Basaglia asked the SIP to support the struggle against the psychiatric hospital. However, the leadership of the SIP considered his approach too theoretically abstract and adventurous, and as being too close to the highly contesting political movements of those years. The movement led by Basaglia reproached the leadership of the SIP, formed by the most powerful psychiatrists of the University and psychiatric hospitals, to be an expression of the repressive function of psychiatry and above all to have responsibility for the dramatic condition of inmates. The first aim of Basaglia and his followers was the closure of the psychiatric hospital, while that of the SIP was to put psychiatry within a

Presidents of the Italian Society of Psychiatry 1873-2013

1873-1891 Andrea Verga (Milan)
 1891-1896 Serafino Biffi (Milan)
 1896-1919 Augusto Tamburini (Reggio Emilia and Modena until 1906, then Rome)
 1919-1929 Enrico Morselli (Genoa)
 1929-1942 Arturo Donaggio (Modena)
 1942-1946 Gustavo Modena (Ancona) (de facto)
 1946-1963 Ugo Cerletti (Rome)
 1963-1968 Mario Gozzano (Rome)
 1968-1975 Carlo Lorenzo Cazzullo (Milan)
 1976-1980 Antonio Balestrieri (Verona)
 1980-1982 Franco Rinaldi (Naples)
 1982-1991 Carlo Lorenzo Cazzullo (Milan)
 1991-1994 Dargut Kemali (Naples) - Pier Luigi Scapicchio (Rome)
 1994-2000 Gaspare Vella (Rome) - Pier Luigi Scapicchio (Rome)
 2000-2003 Mario Maj (Naples) - Carmine Munizza (Turin)
 2003-2006 Eugenio Aguglia (Catania) - Carmine Munizza (Turin)
 2006-2009 Alberto Siracusano (Rome) - Mariano Bassi (Bologna)
 2009-2012 Eugenio Aguglia (Catania) - Luigi Ferrannini (Genoa)
 2012-2015 Emilio Sacchetti (Brescia) - Claudio Mencacci (Milan)

medical context. The premises for an alliance were not good, and in those years of open dialectic the 1968, 1975 and 1977 SIP Congresses were troubled by heterogeneous contestation. Nonetheless, Law 180, which was passed in May 1978 when Antonio Balestrieri from the University of Verona was president, satisfied both expectations, also because soon after Law 833 on healthcare reform included it and ended the separation of psychiatric assistance from general healthcare. The favourable position towards closure of psychiatric hospitals adopted by the SIP, at least since the middle of 1970s, played an important role in convincing those who were reluctant to adopt this original and unexplored solution.

Two years before, with Law 238 of 1976, Cazzullo had obtained University Chairs of Psychiatry independents from those of Neurology, thus breaking the position of subordination which had lasted since the beginning of the century³⁰. Balestrieri led the SIP

from 1976 to 1980, when he was succeeded by Franco Rinaldi, from the University of Naples, from 1980 to 1982, when Cazzullo returned to its presidency until 1991. The office was then passed to Dargut Kemali (1922–2011), from the University of Naples, and Pier Luigi Scapicchio, a psychiatrist in Rome; he was the first psychiatrist who was not affiliated with a University since 1906, when Tamburini left the asylum. Times had changed after Law 180, and an amendment to the Statute established an alternation of the presidency between members affiliated with and not affiliated with a University during the triennial period between congresses.

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